

Understanding Child Sexual Abuse Definitions and Rates

By Terri DeWalt



We at Sexual Assault Services (SAS) provide support to all survivors of sexual violence in Racine County, regardless of age or other defining characteristic. This is different than many other rape crisis centers around the country, which focus on providing services to adult victims of sexual violence. As a result, we want to take this opportunity to explore some of the defining characteristics of child sexual abuse.

Child sexual abuse is a pervasive public health problem that affects us all directly or indirectly. Child sexual abuse can cause many short- and long-term struggles for victims, offenders, families, communities, and larger social systems. There is hopeful evidence that rates of child sexual abuse, as well as other forms of child maltreatment, are declining. However, there is equally concerning evidence that the actual rates of child sexual abuse may not be fully known because of significant barriers victims and community leaders face in reporting crimes. Therefore, rates of child sexual abuse remain high.

What is child sexual abuse?

The first step to ending child sexual abuse is to understand what constitutes this epidemic. Child sexual abuse definitions vary across disciplines, social systems, research efforts, and laws. There are many forms of child sexual abuse, including but not limited to rape, fondling, sexual assault, exposure, voyeurism, and the commercial sexual exploitation of children. Sometimes, child sexual abuse is considered a type of child maltreatment, which also includes physical and psychological abuse as well as forms of neglect.

Barriers to reporting skew what we know about true rates of child sexual abuse

Child sexual abuse is a severely underreported crime. People who sexually abuse children are trusted not only by the children they harm; they are often trusted and respected members of their communities. Offenders frequently use “grooming” tactics to build a connection with children. Grooming can include giving children gifts or rewards, taking them on special outings, or simply giving children attention and affection they may be longing for. While not all offenders use physical force, many use threats to ensure that a child will stay quiet—threatening to harm the child, a loved one, or a pet; or by telling the child that no one will believe them, or that their parents won’t love them anymore if they tell.

Often, our society does not make it easy for children to talk about what is happening to them. When children try to tell someone about the abuse they are experiencing, they are often ignored, dismissed, or made to feel ashamed. Ironically, the very power that is used over children to safeguard their well-being is often exploited by offenders who sexually abuse children. This power imbalance also can create barriers to children having a voice and being able to tell their stories.

Barriers to reporting for children

Child sexual abuse is a crime that is perpetuated in silence and secrecy. Children may not feel they have anyone to tell, because the very people who are supposed to protect them are the ones abusing them or allowing the abuse to happen. Some children may not want to get the offender in trouble, or go to jail. These feelings can intensify when the perpetrator is a family member or close mentor. Some children may not think of telling anyone because sexual abuse and exploitation is seen as “normal”—it has been a part of their larger family systems,

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Rompiendo la Barrera

Breaking the Barrier

By Cassandra De La Rosa

The Interconnection of Sexual Violence and Immigration

As the Bilingual Outreach Advocate, I know that there is a connection between sexual violence, immigration and the work that we do here at Sexual Assault Services of LSS. Currently, any topic surrounding immigration is one that can be politically charged and because of this I would like to state that I have no intention of expressing any views for or against any political view on immigration. The intention of this article is to explain some of the dynamics that surround sexual violence victims and their immigration status. I will also discuss the fact that sexual violence is sometimes occurring on the border when people are crossing into the United States.

What are immigrant women and young girls, and at times men and boys, going through before they make it into our community? According to a report by the United Nations it is predicted that 70% of women and girls who cross the border without protection are sexually assaulted and/or abused. Others say that the actual occurrence of sexual violence is occurring at an even higher rate. The commonality of sexual violence occurring as women and girls cross the border has led many women and girls to take preventative birth control measures before crossing the border. Unfortunately, some have viewed sexual violence as the "the price you pay for crossing the border." As we all know, no one should ever be faced with that choice; and no one should live with the fear or expectation that becoming a victim of sexual violence is inevitable. Anecdotally, rapists have left panties and bras hanging from trees as signs of their "conquest."

With all the violence that is happening on the border it makes the work that we are doing in the Spanish speaking community even more valuable. Although working with sexual violence victims is never easy, the dynamics that are involved in working with undocumented victims can often make providing for the needs of these survivors even more challenging. Besides working through all the barriers that sexual violence survivors face, immigrant survivors are often faced with the following additional barriers to service: language, isolation, fear of deportation, lack of cultural awareness of the United States and the availability of services. The main barriers that I have found to be the most difficult in providing services are language, isolation and the fear of deportation.

Language is a huge barrier. Often immigrants are overwhelmed by the English language and although many social service agencies are becoming more aware of the need to have Spanish speakers on staff, there are still many difficulties that survivors can face. Spanish speakers aren't always familiar with the different dialects within the Spanish language and many survivors don't know that language services are available.

Isolation can also be a huge barrier connected to language. Isolation can easily occur to victims who don't know English, are unfamiliar with American culture and face transportation challenges. A 2004 study, found that immigrant victims are exposed to an "underworld of violence" because they are so often isolated from the help of advocates, law enforcement and other social service agencies.

Those who aren't of documented status are in constant fear of deportation and for victims of abuse this can be an additional challenge. Victims are often fearful of the police and reporting. There are often negative perceptions of law enforcement that are rooted in their countries of origin. Besides some victims not trusting law enforcement, victims are often intimidated into not seeking help by perpetrators who know their legal status and who threaten them with deportation if they do seek help.

In the next issue of Branching Out, I will discuss the incidents of sexual violence that are occurring in detention centers during deportation and what is being done about this violence.

—Cassie



Farewell Carla!

As I sit at my desk in the office of Sexual Assault Services, 40 minutes before my internship has ended and I leave for the last time, I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to experience an internship with this organization. I am thankful that Terri agreed to take me on as an intern and to her and Katy, Vicki, Sam, and Cassie for sharing their knowledge and skills so generously with me. They have also shared of themselves with me and made me feel a part of a wonderful team of professionals.

I have learned so much during my time at SAS, from everyone I have worked with; office staff, volunteers, clients, and other professionals that have a connection with SAS. I feel as though, because of all of you, I will enter into the job market with wonderful and essential experience and a sense of what an organization can be when people who are passionate about injustices work together and share their unique skills to bring justice to the world.

—Carla



Legislative Update

By Vicki Biehn

The Spring Edition of the Branching Out newsletter reviewed several bills that were passed into law or ones that were just a signature away from being the law in Wisconsin. These were bills that the Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault (WCASA) had supported and had worked to pass through the legislative process.

There were many laws that were passed in the last legislative session that will benefit sexual assault survivors directly or indirectly. To recap, these laws expanded school personnel that are required to be mandated reporters of suspected child abuse, increased privacy protections for child sexual assault victims, increased victims' rights, created merit pay increases for assistant district attorneys, changed the statute of limitations on certain crimes, changed the rules of hearsay evidence at preliminary hearings, and changed child pornography laws. You can review these recent laws that were enacted in 2012 at <http://www.wcasa.org/pages/Policy-State.php>.

There were a couple of laws that were passed that WCASA did not support. The first one impacted survivor's ability to seek legal remedies or the physical or mental health services they need to recover from their sexual assault. Act 16 preempts local governments from enacting ordinances which require employers to provide employees with paid or unpaid leave to deal with family, medical, or health issues – thereby stating the current state law which provides for unpaid leave in limited situations will apply statewide. Specifically the Act states that local governments may not enact ordinances that allow leave to be taken to seek medical attention related to sexual assault, obtain services related to that assault, to relocate because of an assault, or to be involved in court proceedings related to sexual abuse. You can access the statute at https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2011/related/acts/16/_1.

The second one is Act 216 and this law repeals portions and amends others of what was known as the "Healthy Youth Act", passed in the previous legislative session. Among other provisions, it requires that school districts offering a human growth and development curriculum emphasize abstinence as the preferred method of avoiding pregnancy. If you wish to review the act you can at <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2011/related/acts/216>.

WCASA and the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence (WCADV) will be hosting a legislative advocacy day in March of 2013. This is an opportunity to meet with your representative or their staff person to develop a relationship with them and to share your concerns about issues that related to sexual or domestic violence survivors. Sexual Assault Services will be gathering names and contact information of people who are willing to attend this legislative advocacy day. This is a wonderful opportunity to become more involved

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environments, and communities. Children may feel guilty and blame themselves for the abuse they endure, or for liking aspects of the relationship with the offender. Children may not tell anyone what is happening because they do not want to get in trouble, or they are afraid of what people will think of them. Some may never tell because they simply do not understand what is happening to them.

What are the actual rates of child sexual abuse?

In the U.S. studies show that one in four girls and one in six boys are sexually abused before their 18th birthdays (Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis & Smith, 1990). Different research methods used in gathering data (national population surveys vs. reported cases) as well as evolving definitions make it difficult to arrive at a definitive rate of child sexual abuse. For example, data sets such as those from Child Protective Services agencies may count reported cases of child sexual abuse or only cases that have been substantiated with evidence. Given the underreporting of child sexual abuse and the many challenges in producing evidence and successfully prosecuting this crime, these counts are likely much lower than the actual rate.

The rates of child sexual abuse are alarmingly high. The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study and others over the past 20 years continues to confirm that childhood sexual abuse puts children at significant risk for a wide range of physical, psychological, and social struggles. 2010 data from the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) found that 42.2% of female rape victims were raped before the age of 18 and 27.8% of male victims were first raped when they were ten years old or younger. As we move forward, it is critical that we reinvest in preventing child sexual abuse and reaffirm our continued commitment to ensuring that all children have access to the services they need to survive and thrive in their lives.

What can you do?

We can each do our part by believing and supporting the children in our lives; by reporting any and all suspected child sexual abuse to child protective services or to law enforcement; by volunteering or donating to SAS; and being role models to children by promoting healthy, respectful relationships.

For more information, please contact us at 262-619-1634 or tde-walt@isswis.org.

—Terri

References

From the National Sexual Violence Resource Center: August 2012
Finkelhor, D., Hotaling, G., Lewis, I.A., & Smith, C. (1990). Sexual abuse in a national survey of adult men and women: Prevalence, characteristics, and risk factors. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 14(1), p. 19-28.



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Helping Hands

By Katy Adler

As a small non-profit program with only six staff members, we are continually grateful for our group of Volunteer Advocates, and the many wonderful individuals who are dedicated to supporting sexual assault survivors in Racine County. Our Volunteer Advocates are a constant reminder that the SAS staff is not alone; there are community members who care and show compassion toward survivors as well.

Because we appreciate our Volunteer Advocates so much, we want others to get to know them, as well. In this newsletter, we are spotlighting one of our Burlington Volunteer Advocates, Kim Howe. Kim has been volunteering with SAS since February 2011. In this role, she responds to the Aurora Burlington Memorial Hospital and supports sexual assault survivors and their family members. In the time she has been an Advocate, Kim has already provided invaluable support to 16 survivors and support people.

How did you find out about the program, and what made you decide to join?

I learned about the program through Love, Inc. I had worked with Vicki in the past and knew she did amazing things and wanted to be a part of it.

What do you think makes a person a good SAS Advocate?

A good SAS advocate is one that listens to the survivor. The advocate helps the survivor feel like he or she is in control of what is happening during the reporting process. A good advocate will get answers to the survivor's questions and support the survivor through every step of the reporting process.

What is the most rewarding part of being a SAS Advocate?

The most rewarding part of being a SAS Advocate is being able to provide the survivor with the support he or she needs. I especially enjoy being told that I have made their lives easier or better just by being at their side and supporting them.

What is the most challenging thing about being a SAS Advocate?

The most challenging thing about being a SAS Advocate is that I do not like to see anyone hurting physically, emotionally, or mentally. But that is usually the case when I see the survivors.

Do you volunteer with any other community groups or agencies? If so, what do you do?

I volunteer for my church on the board of trustees. I help make decisions about things the church needs to get done.

What do you do professionally?

I own a small residential cleaning company that I work part-time while I go to school full-time. I am currently working on my Masters in Social Work.

What are some of your other interests and hobbies?

My hobbies include reading, gardening, and in general helping others

My interests include reaching out to troubled teenagers and helping through school and setting them up with the resources they need to be successful. I wish to do that professionally one day.

Would you like to share anything about your family in general or how you being a SAS Advocate has affected your family?

Being a SAS Advocate has impacted my family in small ways. They know when I get a call to go to the hospital someone is hurt and needs my help. This can mean putting off plans for a short time, but no one minds. It makes them feel good that I can make a positive impact on the lives that I touch.

Any other information you would like to share?

Being a SAS Advocate has been more rewarding than I could have ever imagined. I try to bring about something positive out of the negative circumstances whenever possible. I truly enjoy empowering the survivor and helping parents. This is accomplished through understanding and informing. I truly enjoy being a SAS Advocate!

—Katy



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and to feel empowered! Please contact Vicki Biehn at vbiehn@lsswis.org or 262-619-1634 if this is something that you are interested in participating in.

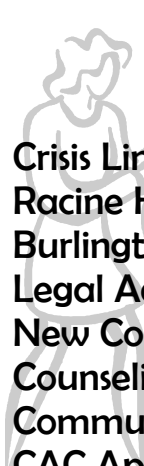
If you wish to learn more about the upcoming WCASA's legislative agenda please go to their website at www.wcasa.org and then look under the Policy and Law section. If you would like to be added to the action alert email list, please contact Vicki Biehn at vbiehn@lsswis.org or Ian Henderson at ianh@wcasa.org.

Lastly, I would like to encourage everyone to vote this fall. If you would like to check and make sure that you are registered to vote go to <https://vpa.wi.gov/VoterSearchScreen.aspx?Language=en-us>. It is very simple, all you need is your name and date of birth and then you can see if you are registered to vote.

—vicki



SAS Program Statistics January-June 2012



Crisis Line Calls.....	90
Racine Hospital Visits.....	31
Burlington Hospital Visits.....	9
Legal Advocacy Sessions.....	21
New Counseling Clients.....	43
Counseling Sessions.....	525
Community Presentations.....	39
CAC Appointments.....	112



Family Advocate

By Samantha Sustachek

Child abuse investigations in Racine County operated for years either without the benefit of a Child Advocacy Center (CAC) or by sending the investigators, children, and their families to a CAC in another community. Happily, the Racine County Child Advocacy Center has been up and running in our community for over four years now, regularly serves close to 200 families per year, and is on track to see even more families than that in 2012. Clearly, this was a needed service in the Racine community. When utilized in child abuse investigations, CACs benefit all parties. Investigations are often more effective, and trauma to children and their families is minimized. Read on to find out how this is accomplished.

As far as benefits to the child victim and the child's family are concerned, probably one of the most important is the reduction of trauma. This is accomplished by reducing the number of times a child has to be interviewed. All investigative parties can be present at a CAC appointment while a trained forensic interviewer conducts a single recorded interview with the child. Any investigator who cannot be present at the initial appointment can watch the interview at a later date. This keeps repeat interviews of children to a minimum and also reduces the time that a family spends participating in the investigative process. Instead of travelling from one place to another for multiple interviews and medical exams, the family comes to one place and most of the needs of the investigation can be met at one time. Not only are the needs of the investigation met at the CAC, but the needs of the family are also considered. Interviews and medical exams can take place, and families can receive immediate crisis intervention and referrals for services. All of this is done in a child-friendly environment, further reducing children's experience of trauma.

Child abuse investigations also benefit from utilization of CACs. The CAC process is efficient for investigators as well as families, and the length of the investigation itself can be reduced when children are brought to CACs. Information collected during a forensic interview by a trained interviewer is non-leading and developmentally appropriate to the age and ability of the child. Medical exams by a nurse practitioner, trained in evaluating children in cases where abuse is suspected, can be offered on the spot based on the information provided by the family and in the forensic interview. These tools (the interview and exam) can help law enforcement and child protective services make more informed decisions about the case, and the information gathered can hold up in court if necessary. Quicker investigations and appropriate forensic interviews and medical exams may lead to more and quicker prosecutions.

Some aspects of the CAC process are of benefit to both the child victims and their families as well as the investigative process. Utilizing a CAC leads to increased communication and collaboration be-

tween the agencies involved in child abuse cases. More effective communication between agencies can lead to a better understanding of one another's individual roles and of the needs of the children and families. Team members are also accountable to each other, so follow through with services and information for families is often better.

In addition, some research also suggests that utilizing a CAC provides a considerable cost savings over a traditional law enforcement/child protective services investigation. This, on top of all the other benefits to the child and family as well as the child abuse investigation makes a clear argument for bringing these investigations to a CAC. Luckily, we now have such a facility right here in the Racine community.

If you would like more information about the Racine County Child Advocacy Center, please feel free to contact Samantha Sustachek at 262-619-1634 Ext. 14 or ssustachek@lsswis.org. You can also call the CAC directly at 262-898-7970.

Some information for this article about the benefits of Child Advocacy Centers was adapted from the Childhelp website at <http://www.childhelp.org/programs/type/advocacy-centers> and the website of the Foothills CAC in Virginia at <http://www.foothillscac.org/benefits.html>.

—Sam

Survivors & Allies Taskforce Meeting



Sexual Assault Services of LSS would like to inform you about an opportunity for sexual assault survivors and their allies to come together this fall. WCASA and Office of Justice Assistance are hosting a Survivors and Allies Taskforce meeting on October 20, 2012 in Milwaukee at the UMOS Headquarters between 10:00 am—4:00 pm. Please join us to celebrate and share our strength, vision and wisdom on this inspiring day.

The agenda is as follows:

10:00 – 10:30 Introductions and Native American Smudging Ceremony

10:30 - 11:00 Centering and Finding Strength Within Ourselves Activity

11:00 – 11:45 Breakout Sessions:

- Group Communications
- Policy Services
- Prevention Education
- Mothers and Allies
- Teens

12:00 – 12:45 Lunch and Dance Performances

1:00 – 3:15 Building Connections Workshop-Presented by Alice and Bev from Wise Women Gathering Place

3:30 – 4:00 Breathing Relaxation Exercises

This meeting is free of charge and lunch will be provided. There are limited scholarships available for lodging, mileage and meals. Please contact Vicki at vbiehn@lsswis.org or 262-619-1634 for more information about the meeting and scholarships.





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Contact Us!

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Burlington, WI 53105
262-763-6226 Ext. 109

24 Hour Crisis Line: 262-637-SAFE (7233)

Website: <http://www.sasoflss.org>

Stay Connected!



Join our News and Events email update list! Would you like to receive information on upcoming SAS events and volunteer opportunities? Email Samantha Sustachek at ssustachek@lsswis.org with "SAS news and events" in the subject line and she will include you in all SAS news and events related emails.

Sexual Assault Services seeks to create a safe and compassionate environment to help promote the healing of sexual assault survivors and their support people.

Sexual Assault Services is funded by United Way of Racine County, Victims of Crime Act grant, Sexual Assault Victim Services grant, Violence Against Women Act grant, the Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault, and the Racine Dominican Fund.